University of Chicago Press

Educational and Economic Composition of Religious Groups: An Analysis of Poll Data
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Source: *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 48, No. 5 (Mar., 1943), pp. 574-579
Published by: University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2769180
Accessed: 29-10-2015 07:04 UTC

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EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC COMPOSITION OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS: AN ANALYSIS OF POLL DATA

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ABSTRACT

This article illustrates how public-opinion surveys can be used to gather vital information of interest to sociologists. The economic status, education, and religious affiliation of approximately fourteen thousand persons are analyzed to show the relationships among these variables. The data indicate the increasing proportion of Protestants with increasing income and education. In the middle income group, church membership increases particularly rapidly as education increases.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The sampling procedures currently used by investigators concerned with the study of public-opinion and market research have uncovered a mine of information pertinent to the relationships among various indices commonly used for classificatory purposes in social research. By now several hundred thousand people have been questioned by polling agencies, and the economic status, sex, age, political affiliation, and place of residence of most of these people have been recorded. The data given here are meant merely to illustrate a type of information now available from the public-opinion polls.[1]

Most investigators realize that sampling techniques, as well as other techniques with which they deal, are still in their infant stages. As more census figures are accumulated, as criteria for the determination and classification of economic status, education, and occupation are improved, as the problems of selecting and training of interviewers are solved, as new statistical tests are developed for the treatment of such data, more adequate data will become available and more reliable analysis can be made.[2]

[1] Dr. George Gallup has generously permitted the writer to reproduce all the data of the American and British Institutes of Public Opinion and to use the facilities of the American Institute for purposes of social research. The Office of Public Opinion Research is glad to co-operate with qualified scholars by putting its facilities at their disposal in so far as practicable.

[2] No attempt is made here to check the data against the 1940 census returns. The adequacy and goodness of poll samples is another problem. The concern here is merely to examine the relationships in these sample data.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The comparison of the economic and educational composition of Protestant and Catholic groups has been selected here for special examination because of the intrinsic interest of the problem and because comparatively few data are available. All data shown here are based on two surveys conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion (A.I.P.O.) and two by the Office of Public Opinion Research. These particular surveys were taken between March, 1939, and December, 1940. They represent a total of approximately fourteen thousand cases. The totals of different tables vary because of incomplete answers to certain questions. In each survey a "social" rather than a "political" cross-section of the population was obtained. This means that an equal number of men and women were sought by the investigators and that more Negroes and poor people in the South were obtained than is usual in A.I.P.O. surveys.

Besides the respondents' religion, the other information obtained on these ballots was economic status, education, section of the country, rural-urban status, and political affiliation. Tabulations on this material could proceed almost indefinitely. It is not the task here to try to explain any of the relationships obtained. More systematic descriptions of the relationships should occur in the context of some problem.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 give the raw data. Table 4 is based on Table 1 and illustrates the shape the data assume in percentage terms. Any person interested in a specific

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problem can percentage the data as he prefers, holding constant any two variables. No attempt is made here to go beyond a tertiary breakdown because of the dwindling number of cases then obtained.

income while the percentage of Catholics in each section except the South increases inversely with the increase in income. The percentage of Protestants classified in the "lower" income group in all sections except

TABLE 1

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMIC STATUS*
(Figures indicate number of cases in each group)

EDUCATION	RELIGION	ECONOMIC STATUS			TOTAL NATIONAL
		Lower	Middle	Upper	
College	Catholic	14	97	53	164
	Protestant	71	685	399	1,155
	Nonmember	33	191	116	340
Total national		118	973	568	1,659
High school	Catholic	154	414	65	633
	Protestant	534	1,676	424	2,634
	Nonmember	219	559	124	902
Total national		907	2,649	613	4,169
Grade school	Catholic	352	335	50	737
	Protestant	1,026	1,219	192	2,437
	Nonmember	639	591	69	1,299
Total national		2,017	2,145	311	4,473
Less than grade school	Catholic	233	118	17	368
	Protestant	953	547	49	1,549
	Nonmember	565	291	19	875
Total national		1,751	956	85	2,792
National	Catholic	753	964	185	1,902
	Protestant	2,584	4,127	1,064	7,775
	Nonmember	1,456	1,632	328	3,416
Total		4,793	6,723	1,577	13,093

*"Nonmembers" also includes Jews; "College" means college graduate; "High school" means high-school graduate; "Grade school" means grade-school graduate.

SOME RELATIONSHIPS SHOWN

The tables, first, offer further evidence for certain commonly known facts: that Catholics are poorer and less well educated than Protestants, that the South has by far the largest proportion of Protestants of any section of the country, that the Pacific Coast states have the largest concentration of those who are not church members.

More specifically, with respect to economic status, the percentage of Protestants in each section increases with the increase in

the South ranges from 25 to 32 per cent, while the percentage of Catholics classified in the lower income group ranges from 30 to 51 per cent; the percentage range of Protestants in the upper income group varies from 14 to 18 per cent and of Catholics from 6 to 15 per cent. The southern Protestants present, of course, a special case: in most sections the ratio of upper- to lower-class Protestants is about 1 to 2, whereas in the South the ratio is about 1 to 6.

In New England and the Middle Atlantic states, where there are large numbers of

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Catholics,[3] the drop in the percentage of Catholics with increased income is approximately of the same magnitude as the gain of Protestants with increased income in these sections. Hence the percentage of nonmembers remains relatively constant.

There is a definite tendency for the percentage of Protestants within the upper and middle income groups to increase with the increase in education. Stated differently, the percentage of persons with higher education is greater for Protestants than for Catholics in the upper and middle income levels. This trend is not found, however, in the lower income group where the below-grade-school group contains a greater proportion of Protestants and a smaller proportion of Catholics than does the grade-school group. This is due primarily to the peculiar economic and educational distribution of southern Protestants, who represent nearly 60 per cent of all the Protestants in our miniature population. Whereas 33 per cent

TABLE 2

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECTION, RELIGION, AND ECONOMIC STATUS
(Figures indicate number of cases in each group)

SECTION	RELIGION	ECONOMIC STATUS			TOTAL
		Lower	Middle	Upper	
New England	Protestant	98	225	72	395
	Catholic	120	147	25	292
	Nonmembers	82	111	35	228
Middle Atlantic	Protestant	511	834	242	1,587
	Catholic	362	409	70	841
	Nonmembers	377	453	120	950
East Central	Protestants	401	792	261	1,454
	Catholic	142	175	43	360
	Nonmembers	383	396	87	866
West Central	Protestants	310	659	199	1,168
	Catholic	83	170	27	280
	Nonmembers	200	280	60	540
South	Protestants	1,210	1,325	203	2,738
	Catholic	79	70	16	165
	Nonmembers	505	388	44	937
Rocky Mountain	Protestants	138	252	63	453
	Catholic	40	34	4	78
	Nonmembers	108	156	17	281
Pacific Coast	Protestant	132	234	81	447
	Catholic	28	35	11	74
	Nonmembers	145	215	60	420
Total	.....	5,454	7,360	1,740	14,554
Grand total	.....	.....	.....	.....	14,554

However, in other sections the decline in the proportion of Catholics with increased income is relatively slow while the increase of Protestants is relatively large, resulting in a larger number of those who are not church members for the lower economic group.

[3] Other poll data available show that first-generation Irish and Italians number 17 per cent in New England, 13 per cent in the Middle Atlantic states, and 4 per cent or less in the other sections of the country.

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of all the Protestants sampled were placed in the lower income group, 44 per cent of the southern Protestants were so placed, only 28 per cent of all Protestants with the southerners excluded. While 37 per cent of all the Protestants in the low income group have had less than complete grade-school education, this figure rises to 53 per cent of the southern Protestants in the low income group and drops to 25 per cent of low income Protestants with the South excluded; and while 23 per cent of all Protestants in the low income group have had high-school education or better, this figure drops to 14 per cent for southern Protestants.

The percentage of those who are not church members is highest in the low income group. Within the middle income bracket, church membership increases significantly with educational status.

Protestants in every section have had more schooling than Catholics. For example, excluding the South, 15 to 20 per cent of the Protestants in each section are recorded as college graduates as compared to only 7 to 11 per cent for the Catholics.[4] The range of those who have had at least a high-

TABLE 3

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECTION, RELIGION, AND EDUCATION

(Figures indicate number of cases in each group)

SECTION	RELIGION	EDUCATIONAL LEVEL				TOTAL
		Less than Grade-School Graduate	Grade-School Graduate	High-School Graduate	College Graduate	
New England	Protestant	33	94	163	74	364
	Catholic	42	96	100	29	267
	Nonmembers	34	56	77	40	207
Middle Atlantic	Protestant	198	476	522	244	1,440
	Catholic	161	310	243	55	769
	Nonmembers	159	307	245	127	838
East Central	Protestant	172	486	508	252	1,418
	Catholic	57	141	108	36	342
	Nonmembers	203	332	223	63	821
West Central	Protestant	124	383	453	177	1,137
	Catholic	38	100	101	20	259
	Nonmembers	93	216	144	46	499
South	Protestant	919	785	626	252	2,582
	Catholic	61	39	44	15	159
	Nonmembers	378	293	139	37	847
Rocky Mountain	Protestant	38	122	187	82	429
	Catholic	12	24	29	5	70
	Nonmembers	37	102	80	29	248
Pacific Coast	Protestant	40	107	204	81	432
	Catholic	5	28	31	6	70
	Nonmembers	52	138	156	52	398
Total		2,856	4,635	4,383	1,722	13,596
Grand total						13,596

[4] These percentages are high when compared to census data. The reason is the extreme difficulty of obtaining by polling device an honest answer on educational status because of the obvious prestige value of enhancing one's educational attainments. However, the error here is probably constant with respect to Protestants and Catholics.

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school education is 53 to 66 per cent for Protestants and 38 to 53 per cent for Catholics. In other words, the highest ratio of high-school graduates found for Catholics in any section of the country (Pacific Coast) was no higher than the lowest ratio of high-school graduates for Protestants (Middle Atlantic and East Central states). The lower percentage of Protestants in the below-grade-school and the grade-school levels and the higher percentage of Protestants in the high-school and college levels in Table 4 are statistically significant.

As was found with respect to economic status, in New England and the Middle Atlantic states the drop in the percentage of Catholics with the increase in education is approximately of the same magnitude as the rise in the percentage of Protestants in these sections. In the other sections the increase of Protestants is relatively large and the decline of Catholics relatively small, with a correspondingly larger proportion of those who are not church members as education declines.

Within each educational group the percentage of Protestants increases with the increase in economic status.[5] This trend is least noticeable in the lowest educational group, but in each of the other educational groups the upper economic class has about 10 per cent more Protestants than the low-

TABLE 4

EDUCATIONAL DISTRIBUTION BY RELIGION WITH ECONOMIC STATUS CONSTANT

Economic Status	Religion	Education				National (Per Cent)
		Below Grade School (Per Cent)	Grade School (Per Cent)	High School (Per Cent)	College (Per Cent)	
Upper	Catholics	20	16	11	9	12
	Protestants	58	62	69	70	67
	Nonmembers	22	22	20	21	21
Total		100	100	100	100	100
Middle	Catholics	12	15	16	10	14
	Protestants	57	57	63	70	62
	Nonmembers	31	28	21	20	24
Total		100	100	100	100	100
Lower	Catholics	13	17	17	12	16
	Protestants	55	51	59	60	54
	Nonmembers	32	32	24	28	30
Total		100	100	100	100	100
National	Catholics	13	17	15	10	15
	Protestants	56	54	63	70	59
	Nonmembers	31	29	22	20	26
Total		100	100	100	100	100

[5] When the relationship between educational status and income is determined more exactly by calculation of coefficients of contingency and product moment correlations, the following results are obtained:

Religion	C	r	Standard Error of r
Catholics	.37	.36	.02
Protestants	.41	.43	.01
Protestants, excluding southern Protestants	.37	.38	.01
Southern Protestants	.42	.44	.02
Nonmembers	.40	.41	.01
National total	.40	.42	.01

Although the assumptions of correlation procedures are by no means fulfilled by data of this

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est economic class. Again the trends are upset in the lower educational groups because of the southern Protestants: southern Protestants with less than grade-school education are slightly lower in economic status than Catholics, only 53 per cent of grade-school Protestants in the South are classified as middle income or above, while 60 per cent of the other Protestants in the sample are so classified.

Those who are not church members are found in increasing numbers as either income or education decreases. The highest percentage of those not church members occurs in the lowest educational group and—within that group—in the lowest income bracket. Conversely, church membership goes up with income, particularly among persons who do not have a high-school education. Increased church membership is absorbed entirely by the Protestants in the three upper educational groups.

To summarize the economic and educational composition of Protestant and Catholic groups in the United States:

1. The ratio of Protestants in a population group tends to increase with the economic status of the group. Conversely, the ratio of Catholics in a population group tends to decrease with the economic status of the group. A higher concentration of Protestants and a lower concentration of Catholics in the middle and upper economic groups is likely to be found among the persons in these groups who have had the most formal education. This tendency is not found in the low income group because of the heavy weighting given by southern Protestants to the low income and low educational groupings.

2. The ratio of Protestants in a population group tends to increase with the educational status of the group, and a higher concentration of Protestants within any educational group is likely to be found as economic status increases. With the exception of Catholics in the lowest educational group there is a tendency for the ratio of Catholics in a population group to decrease as the economic status of the group increases. The exception is due to the heavy weighting of southern Protestants in the lowest educational and income group.

3. The number of church members in a population increases with both the economic and the educational status of the members of the population. Or, conversely, the number of those without church membership increases as the income or educational levels are descended. At the upper income level, however, the proportion of church members is relatively constant irrespective of educational status. The most marked increase in church membership with increasing schooling is found in the middle economic group, while the most marked increase in church membership with increasing economic status is found among persons who have had only a grade-school education or less.

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type, the similarity of C and r indicates that there is some linear correlation between economic status and education. A further analysis of these data is now in progress to define more fully the relationship between economic status and education, so that a basis for prediction from one of these variables to the other may be established.

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